



Ask the I&R Specialist December 2005

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I have a disability and I have questions about doing my federal tax returns. Can you assist with tax advice?

While the Division of Disability Services is not qualified to answer tax questions, what we can do is refer callers to the Internal Revenue Service's customer service hotline at 800-829-1040 or to their TDD line at 800-829-4059 to get information from an IRS customer service representative.

You may also want to visit the IRS website at www.irs.gov for advice or to request publications. Publication 17 provides general information on filling out tax returns. Persons with disabilities may also find that Publication 524 (Credit for the Elderly and Disabled), Publication 502 (Medical and Dental Expenses, and Publication 907 (Tax Highlights for Persons with Disabilities) will contain information of particular relevance to their circumstances.

Additionally, your local Independent Living Center may be able to direct you to a local tax clinic which can provide you with one-on-one assistance.

I have a psychiatric diagnosis and am currently taking medication and undergoing therapy. Right now I'm looking for a job and setting up job interviews. What, if anything, should I disclose to a prospective employer?

The Americans with Disabilities Act does not require an individual with a disability to self-disclose during a job interview process. If an applicant with any kind of disability meets all of the legitimate requirements for a position and can perform all of the essential functions of the job with or without the provision of a "reasonable

accommodation”, then discussion of the disability need not come into the interview. If you will be able fully handle the position’s responsibilities if an employer provides a reasonable accommodation, then you should request that accommodation in writing once you are hired.

Be aware, however, that the ADA specifically protects “qualified individuals with disabilities,” and no law requires an employer to hire anyone, with or without a disability, who cannot do the job as it is described in the job description. Anyone interviewing for a position has a responsibility to be honest when describing his or her abilities and qualifications, and as an individual with a disability you are not protected by the law if you are hired but failed to disclose information with would have legitimately disqualified you from the job.

“Discrimination” is the failure – for reasons of prejudice - to hire the most qualified applicant for the job, not failure to hire a non-qualified applicant.

If you feel have more specific questions, or if you feel that you have experienced discrimination during a hiring process, I urge to contact the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) at 800-669-4900 or www.eeoc.gov. The EEOC is the federal government agency which is responsible for interpreting and enforcing civil rights laws in the workplace.

My child has cerebral palsy – where can I buy toys for him that are adapted to his special needs?

When buying toys for a child with a disability, it is best to first make an assessment of the child’s condition to determine what items may be appropriate, or contrastingly, inappropriate for that individual. Some examples of unfit toys may be objects with flashing lights for a child with a seizure disorder or items that are difficult to hold or maneuver for someone with Cerebral Palsy.

Many toy manufacturers have special product lines that accommodate children with special needs. Furthermore, internet websites, mailing catalogues, and some sections in stores supply, list, and describe toys that are made for children with special needs. The Wisconsin First Step list posted on the NAS.com Down Syndrome website, <http://www.nas.com/downsyn/toy.html>, has a

number of resources for special needs toy retailers. Also, www.specialneedstoys.com has a comprehensive list of disability toys.

And you might want to check out The University of Nebraska Lincoln/Center on Children, Families, and the Law website at <http://nncf.unl.edu/common/toys.html>.

Toy 'R' Us, as well as other retailers, also carry special needs toys in their stores, or may have catalogues available upon request.

Since my spinal cord injury, it's been suggested to me that I could benefit from having a service dog. How can a service dog assist me, and where would I obtain one?

A service dog is a dog that is trained to assist individuals with disabilities with tasks that they may be unable to perform independently. Examples may include picking items up off the floor or pulling a wheelchair. It is important to understand that service animals are working animals and by federal law are permitted in places where pets would not be allowed.

In order to find out information about obtaining a service dog, there are organizations that we can recommend. Canine Companions for Independence, Canine Partners for Life, and the Delta Society all programs that train and provide service dogs. Canine Companions for Independence is located in Farmingdale, NY and can be contacted by calling (800) 572-2275. Canine Partners for Life, in Cochranville, PA can be contacted by calling (610) 869-4902 and the Delta Society, Bellevue, WA, can be reached at (425) 226-7357.